

preaching only too well.<sup>1</sup> They knew how to make a dis\* course on the seven deadly sins attractive, by telling a long story of a miser carried off by the devil, or a murderer detected in the act. The arts of sensationalism were their stock-in-trade. They were clever at organising those waxwork groups which still form in Southern Europe a side of Catholicism so attractive to the vulgar.<sup>2</sup> Protected by the authority and license of the Pope, they carried off the congregations wholesale from the local clergy. They preached everywhere, they gathered money for the adornment of their own churches, they gave absolution in their own confessionals, they buried the dead in their own graveyards. Fees and pious offerings were lost to the curate and went to the friars.<sup>3</sup>

But the main attraction that they had for the baser sort of men was the cheap price at which they granted - absolution. A window erected in a Carmelite convent could secure easy shrift for the crimes of the great, a pair of old shoes and a dinner given to the Franciscan on his rounds could obtain heaven's pardon for the peasant. This was the charge repeated against them most frequently and with the strongest emphasis by all their critics.

By such arts, often combined with qualities more admirable, the friars became the spiritual guides and the actual masters

J of many households. As might be expected, it was with women that their influence was paramount. In female life piety plays a larger part. The proportion of women to men among those who attend church will always be the pride and sorrow of the clergy. Where the personal influence of the priest is strong, it is strongest of all with women. So it was in the case of the friars.<sup>4</sup> The father of English^naicrative poetry has left us an exquisite dialogue between the friar and

<sup>1</sup> *Sermones*, i. xvii, ii. 57-9; *S. E. W.*, ii. 166; *Polemical Works*, i. 97; *Dialogus* 365; *Matt.*, 8, 16, 105.

<sup>2</sup> *Franciscana*, 606-7.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.* 605; Brown's *Fasciculus*, ii. 468 *et seq.*; Langland, P. PZ., B, text, xi. 53-80, and B, v. 136-52, 0, vii. 118 *et seq.*; Wycliffe, S. E. TF., iii. 374 and 380; *Pol. Poems* (E. S.), ii. 22-3, 33, 46.

<sup>4</sup> Brown's *Fasciculus*, ii. 479; *Franciscana*, 602-4; *S. E. W.*, iii. 199; *Matt.*, 10; *Pol. Works*, i. 36; P. PL, 0, iv. 38 *et seq.*; Knighton, ii. 198; *Pol. Poems* ii. 48-9.